

RECLAMATION

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Reclamation's
Newsletter on
Safety and
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Health

The Safety Factor

Director's Message:

The Price of Complacency

From Karen Knight, Director, Security, Safety, and Law Enforcement,
Denver Office

I start this message by congratulating the Pacific Northwest Region for receiving the Commissioner's Safety Award for 2018. Pacific Northwest leaders demonstrated their commitment to changing their safety culture by thinking of new ways to recognize, implement, improve, and reward safety across the entire region. They are an example for us all. Thank you to everyone in the PN Region for your commitment to safety.

I have been thinking a lot about safety recently. In April, I was preparing to speak about the Safety Program at the Reclamation Leadership Team meeting. One of the findings in DOI's 2013 evaluation of Reclamation's Safety Program was complacency in the workplace with respect to safety. In thinking about what I would say at the meeting, I looked at all the work we've done since 2013 to bolster the safety culture in Reclamation. I reviewed the Safety Action Plan reports and numerous safety recommendations and implementation strategies. I was pleased that we have made so much progress. But then, even as I reflected on our improvement, an accident occurred in the Denver warehouse that resulted in the hospitalization of one of our employees.

Reclamation employees operate in a high-hazard, high-risk environment, and Reclamation leaders develop procedures and policies to control the risks. But people still get hurt. Why? Why are we complacent about our own safety? A level of comfort from having performed a task dozens of times without incident? Familiarity with the work environment? Unquestioning faith in the capabilities of those helping us?

I'm not sure I have an answer. Something within human nature allows me to believe that an accident won't happen to me because I am (somehow) in control of the situation and will be able to prevent it. Then a lost-time injury to a coworker performing a relatively common task wakes me up. I realize I am not invincible, and that I have an obligation to be more vigilant in identifying unsafe situations and correcting them before...

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Did You Know Stats: Roadway Deaths Down Slightly in 2017

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 37,133 people died in motor vehicle accidents (MVAs) in 2017.

This number is a decrease of only 1.8% from the 37,806 MVA deaths in 2016. On-the-job MVA fatalities are 0.5% of all roadway deaths.

OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, states that an average of 24% of on-the-job fatalities are caused by MVAs, which is approximately 222 worker deaths in 2018.

Director's Message

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I am proud of the ever-improving safety culture in Reclamation. The Safety Action Plan was truly a Reclamation-wide effort. One hundred thirty-four people took part in the study teams. I thank everyone who was part of this initiative for your time, talents, and dedication. Your efforts resulted in over 130 recommendations, and we are well on our way to implementing almost all of them. Many obvious changes in our workplace are evidence of this important work. But the true success or failure of Reclamation's safety culture depends on whether we as workers consciously and voluntarily take safety precautions to lower the risks we face, every day and with every task, no matter how small. If we don't make the right choices every single time, we introduce greater risk and chance of injury for ourselves and for everyone around us.

As I close this message, I remind myself—and urge you—to shake off complacency and take action to improve the safety in our work environment each and every day.

Commutes Affect U.S. Workers

A recent survey by Robert Half Global Staffing reported that 23 percent of surveyed workers who live in one of 28 major cities said they have quit a job because of their commute. The statistic was even higher among respondents living in Chicago, Miami, New York, and San Francisco.

Commutes can cause employees to experience higher stress levels and reduced morale for their job. In an employment market where a skilled or educated worker has numerous options for places to work, the trend is that employees who find their commute too stressful will look for a new job closer to home.

Some employers are taking steps to ease the burden of a stressful commute. Reclamation has a policy in place to encourage carpooling/vanpooling and using public transit, when feasible. Teleworking is another option that can reduce the number of days per week that an employee has to face their commute. Check with your supervisor to see if any of these possibilities are available to you.

When you do have to face your dreaded commute, practice patience and avoid getting keyed up in traffic. It is better to arrive late than to be in an accident.

How Does Commuting Affect Us?

By DeAundra Brabham, Denver Safety Office

It may be a daily commute to work or an exciting road trip to your favorite vacation spot: regardless, we spend a great deal of time in our cars. Minutes spent driving can really add up and have a negative impact on our health. According to the *Washington Post*, “Americans spend approximately 26 minutes commuting one way to work every day, adding up to over 200 hours every year.” At a minimum, this adds up to nearly one hour spent in our cars every day. To sum it up, that’s a lot of time spent on the road.

Whether we experience consistent, short commutes or long daily drives, we are subjected to damaging effects on both our physical and mental states. Such adverse effects include:

- Increases in blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar

Even if we don’t suffer from road rage we will from time to time become annoyed while driving. As our anger increases, our blood pressure rises, resulting in harmful effects to our hearts and brains. Studies conducted by the School of Medicine in St. Louis and the Cooper Institute in Dallas reported that commuting at least 20 miles each day can lead to higher cholesterol levels. An increase in cholesterol can lead to an increased risk for heart disease or stroke. These studies also found that anger causes increases in blood sugar levels, which can result in diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and kidney disease.

- Weight gain

As our commute time increase, health risks rise and exercise time lessens. According to the same study, the more time we spend in the car, the less time we have for minimal exercise such as walking.

- Risk of depression and anxiety

Not only the body suffer from daily commuting. Long commuters suffer from higher levels of stress and anxiety than those with shorter or no commute.. Reports have shown that those with long commutes were 33 percent more likely to suffer from depression. Increased stress from commuting also contributes to physical health issues. Commuters who suffer from anxiety and depression may struggle with obesity and poor sleep.

Simply put, commuting just makes us unhappy! Commuters experience less life satisfaction and happiness than people who do not commute. While there’s not much that many of us can do to shorten or eliminate our commutes, there are still a few things that we can do to make the drive less stressful. Here are a few suggestions for having a positive commute:

- Use the time to unwind with music, audio-books, or podcasts to improve productivity, decrease stress, and reduce anxiety.
- Remove thoughts of control during the commute. Understanding that we do not have control over traffic or the train speed can lower our levels of stress and anxiety.
- If you are fortunate enough to live in a bike-friendly area and weather permits, try riding a bike to work. Also take breaks outside during your work day. Enjoying the fresh air and natural environment helps boost your mood and reduces stress levels.

Did You Know Stats: Eye Injuries in 2018

The rate of eye injuries in the United States has doubled from approximately 1,000 per day in 2003 to over 2,000 per day in 2017. This includes work and non-work related eye injuries, according to the American Academy of Ophthalmology. On average, 40 of those are workplace injuries that result in loss of vision or loss of the eye.

Reclamation had 10 reported eye injuries in 2017; none resulted in permanent loss of vision or loss of the eye.

Are You Your Own Worst Enemy?

By Sharon Orlando Blunden, Denver Safety Office

According to the National Institute of Safety and Health, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are caused by sudden or sustained exposure to repetitive motion, force, vibration, and awkward postures. MSDs can affect the muscles, nerves, tendons, ligaments, joints, and cartilage in your upper and lower limbs, neck, and lower back. When I conduct ergonomic evaluations or injury reviews, employees simply want to know why their neck or wrist hurts while working at their computer or why their knees and back are stiff or feel strained from working in a scroll-case all week. Unfortunately, there's not an easy answer to solve those questions. The whole idea of ergonomics is to fit the task or job to the worker; however, when I conduct ergonomic evaluations, I find the employee is their own worst enemy in forming their activities around the work environment instead of matching the job task or workstation setup to their abilities or limitations. The Washington State Department of Labor and Industries outlines five ergonomic risk factors to be mindful of when reviewing a job task before you begin work in the field or in the office environment:

- Repetition – Performing the same motions throughout the day which can lead to trauma in your joints or surrounding tissues.
- Static Loading or Sustained Exertions – Holding the muscles of the body in a single position for long periods of time. For example, holding your body upright and not using the back of your chair for support, or working in a crouched position.
- Awkward Posture or Positions – Bending the joints into postures where they're most likely to be injured.
- Mechanical Contract Stress – Bringing the body into contact with a hard surface that presses into the soft tissues, such as tendons, nerves, and blood vessels, which may lead to serious injuries over time.

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Controlling Noise in Hydro-electric Power: Part 2 – Flaming Gorge Powerplant

By Michael L. Green, Denver Safety Office

Noise-induced hearing loss is Reclamation's number one workers' compensation cost. However, noise-induced hearing loss is preventable. While Reclamation continues to encourage and enforce the use of hearing protection equipment, such as ear plugs and ear muffs, we are also exploring options to reduce noise exposure using engineering controls.

In 2011, the Safety and Occupational Health Office initiated a research and development project to identify primary noise sources and reduce noise levels in Reclamation's powerplants by using engineered noise control materials and methods. This effort is currently continuing through a partnership with the Office of Naval Research. In August 2017, engineered noise controls were installed at Flaming Gorge Powerplant. The follow-up noise survey conducted in May 2018 showed a significant decrease in noise levels in the powerplant.

Flaming Gorge Powerplant installed acoustic absorption panels on the generator level walls, high transmission loss/absorption acoustic barriers on the rails around each generator, acoustic absorption panels in



Generator Floor

the turbine pits, high transmission loss/absorption acoustic barriers around the cooling water valves, and flexible noise barriers at scroll case and draft tube passageways. Flaming Gorge personnel also installed acoustic absorption panels in a draft tube passageway.

Data from the follow-up noise survey at Flaming Gorge Powerplant indicated the

noise level on the generator level decreased about 5 decibels (from 85 decibels before to 80 decibels after). The noise level in the turbine pits decreased up to 15 decibels (from 91 decibels before to 76 decibels after).

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Safety Factor Editorial Corner

Red Is Not a Natural Eye Color

Editorial by MRutheyi Thompson, Denver Safety Office

Sailing. It takes me away. Just a dream and the wind to carry me. Sun shining brightly on the gentle waves of Lake Higo in northeastern Oklahoma. It was two weeks of Girl Scout sailing day camp, and every day was utterly magnificent. True, the occasional afternoon thunderstorm would roll through, but it would only temporarily delay our activities on the water. For the most part, eleven young women and their Girl Scout leaders spent eight hours a day, Monday through Friday, in the glorious early June days that Green Country Oklahoma is famous for.

After a week of complaining that my eyes felt irritated and painful, my mom took a good look at my eyes. They were a spectacular shade of reddish pink, almost fuchsia, so off to the emergency room we went. The cute osteopathic intern took a look at my eyes and said, “You know that red is not a natural eye color, right? Reserved mostly for orcs and goblins.” The geeky high school freshman girl in me laughed, but he was right...red is *not* a natural eye color.

So what happened? How did my eyes get so red? All I had done was spend a fantastic week learning how to sail! I wore sunscreen and a hat, as required by my Girl Scout leaders. I wore a t-shirt and shorts over my swimsuit, as required. I even wore water shoes, which was not required. I had been so careful and followed all the rules, so what had happened to my eyes?

I sunburned them. Yes, that’s a thing. Who knew?! My mom, the medical and safety person in our family, didn’t know that. Sure enough, it is possible, and I had done a great job of it. I couldn’t figure out how I’d sunburned my eyes. I never looked directly at the sun, and I had my hat on all the time I was out in the sun.

Reflection: the lake surface reflected the sun’s light. I had spent most of a 40-hour week staring at a lake with sun reflecting off of it. Now I would spend the next three weeks putting two different prescription drops into my eyes, three times a day. Plus, I had to wear **ugly** sunglasses whenever I was outside, for at least the rest of that summer, if not longer!

The medical term is photokeratitis. You can get it from various sources (see the article on page 9 for more information). The potential for long-term damage is great. I have been blessed that only minor impacts resulted from my photokeratitis episode. That experience made me realize how much I value my eyesight and how seemingly minor things, like proper sunglasses, can protect us from unknown-to-us hazards.

Moral of my story: Safety is not just for when you are at work, it’s a full-time effort.



Photo courtesy of Claz.org

Are You Your Own Worst Enemy?

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- Force – Performing job tasks that apply a moderate amount of force to the small muscles that can cause ligament strains and fatigue, such as the ones found in your hand/wrist.

Remember to report symptoms early to your manager/supervisor, to be proactive in setting up your workstation, and to identify ergonomic risk factors when developing your job hazard analysis.

Hazards Associated with Hoarding

By Monte Bowman, Denver Safety Office

As we grow older, many of us find ourselves taking care of our parents or other mature relatives. A common issue for mature persons is hoarding.

A recent study in the city of Vancouver documented many fire hazards associated with hoarding. Hoarding poses increased fire safety risks because many times it includes piling combustible items, such as reading materials or clothing, on or near heating devices. Hoarded materials may also impede escape or first responder entry, navigation, and exit in the event of an emergency.

Hoarding is identified by the American Psychiatric Association as a mental disorder characterized by accumulating clutter to the point where it interferes with the functional use of the residence. Between 2 and 6 percent of the general population is estimated to suffer from the hoarding disorder.

Intervening in hoarding can be challenging. Residents in their own home have very strong property rights and can withhold cooperation. Most hoarding situations can be resolved by using an informal, relationship-oriented strategy. In the Vancouver study, it took an average of four and a half months to resolve a hoarding situation.

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The Three Most Common Workplace Eye Injuries and How to Avoid Them

Over 2,000 eye injuries occur *every day* in the United States. The National Association of Insurance Commissioners estimates that on-the-job eye injuries cost \$300 million annually, representing medical bills, downtime, adverse impact to the injured employee's immediate family, and payment of workers' compensation claims.

Injuries to the eye can be caused by a variety of activities and hazards, but the top three eye injury categories are flying particles, tool penetrations or punctures, and chemicals. In our workplaces, we could be exposed to any and all of these categories.

How do you protect your eyes from these hazards?

- Identify the hazard in your JHA and select a control to mitigate the hazard. If the hazard cannot be addressed through engineering or administrative controls, wear the appropriate protective eyewear.
- Review and update the JHA often; don't consider it a "one and done" task.
- Make sure the safety eyewear is rated by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), signified by a Z87 marking somewhere on the lens.
- Put up a protective shield or use guarding to reduce the risk of flying debris.
- Avoid getting your face close to chemicals and minimize splashing when working with them.
- Use splash resistant eye protection, such as goggles or a face shield, when working with chemicals or contaminated water.

A final piece of advice: know the proper first aid for the various types of eye injuries. Keep current contact info for local emergency responders and a trusted ophthalmologist available where work is occurring and with the JHA.

Eyesight is precious: protect it.

For more information on eye injuries at work, visit <https://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/injuries-work> and <https://www.ishn.com/articles/110284-most-common-workplace-eye-injuries-and-how-to-avoid-them>.

Safety Spotlight: Reclamation Rope Access Team – An Interview with Rachelle Vanderplas

Rachelle Vanderplas, a geologist in the Provo Area Office, must not have heard the old adage about not mixing business with pleasure. After all, she turned a high-thrill canyoneering hobby into a high-skill position on Reclamation's Rope Access Team. *The Safety Factor* recently caught up with Rachelle over email to find out more about the (literal) highs and lows of working on the Rope Access Team.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

The Safety Factor: How long have you worked for Reclamation?

Rachelle: I started working for Reclamation in 2007. I was initially hired under the Student Career Employment Program (SCEP) as an office assistant. Shortly after I was hired on, I was offered a SCEP position under the Geology Group in Provo. After completing my bachelor's degree at Utah Valley University, I was hired on full time.

How long have you been on the Rope Access Team? And how did you become a team member?

I had heard rumors about a Rope Access Team and I knew this was something I really wanted to be a part of. I spend a lot of my free time on ropes in southern Utah, canyoneering and rock



Rachelle Vanderplas, Cody Ripka, Benjamin Kalminson, Adam Northrop, Dale Hamilton, and Henry Garcia (left to right)

Photo Credit: Jamel Carry

climbing. A few years before working for Reclamation, I had a summer job as a backcountry park ranger in Zion National Park. During that time I had been involved in several search and rescue operations, which required rigging up hauling systems and coordinating as a team to safely haul injured visitors out of slot canyons.

The experiences that summer really forced me to look at rope work differently and gave me a deep respect and understanding for what rope access was really all about. So you can imagine my excitement when I heard there was a potential to be a part of something really special within Reclamation. Before I had been moved to the Geology Group I had approached my supervisor and asked him if I could join the Rope Access Team. It took a little convincing and a few years of patience, but eventually I was hanging from ropes inside Reclamation dams. That was back in 2012, and I have been on Reclamation's Rope Access Team ever since.



Adam Northrup

Photo Credit: Allison Cryns

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Controlling Noise in Hydroelectric Power: Part 2 – Flaming Gorge Powerplant

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The noise level at the cooling water valves decreased 3 decibels (from 87 decibels before to 84 decibels after). The noise level in the penstock gallery decreased 1 decibel (from 89 decibels before to 88 decibels after). The noise level inside the Unit 2 draft tube passageway, where absorption panels were installed on passageway walls, decreased 20 decibels compared to the passageways without absorption panels (from 100 decibels in the Unit 3 passageway to 80 decibels in the Unit 2 passageway). It is now quieter inside the draft tube passageway than in the corridor outside the draft tube passageway. Bottom line: the powerplant is now a quieter and safer work environment.

In a future *Safety Factor*, look for Part 3 of this series, which will outline the engineered noise controls at Shasta Powerplant. For more details about the Noise Control Project, please contact Michael L. Green, Safety Engineer, at mlgreen@usbr.gov or 303-445-3725.

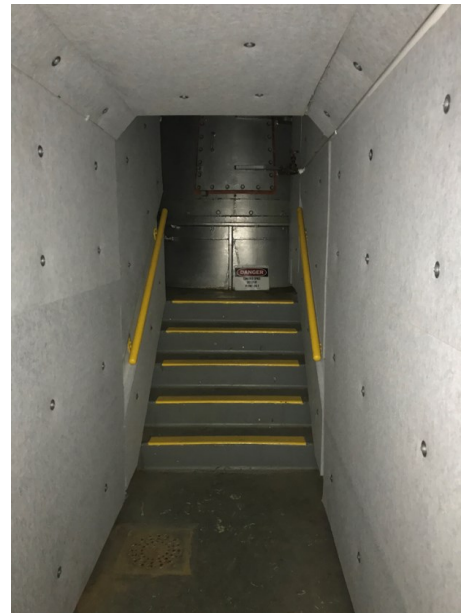
All photos taken by Michael L. Green.



Turbine Pit



Cooling Water Pumps



Unit 2 Draft Tube Passageway

Hazards Associated with Hoarding

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Many residents may be embarrassed about their behavior, lack the organizational skills to make necessary changes, be overly attached to their belongings, lack insight into the dangers posed by hoarding, revert to the same behavior if moved to a new location, and reject any offers of help.

Recommended actions include installing extra smoke and fire detection devices, helping hoarders set manageable weekly goals for disposal and reorganization, and educating all family members and neighbors on the hazards of hoarding. Many communities offer voluntary services to aid in the removal of hoarded materials.

Hoarders often do not fully recognize the severity of their problem, and their motivation to make changes can fluctuate. For the best results, try to create clear, specific goals that the hoarding resident can reach.

Sunburning Your Eyes : Don't Feel the Burn

The rarely talked about eye injury photokeratitis, sunburn of the eyes, can easily occur on even cloudy days. Winter sports and water recreation enthusiasts know that even shaded sun reflecting off of water or snow can cause sunburns to the eyes. Photokeratitis can also originate from other sources, such as tanning beds, UV lamps, and arc welding. In most cases, the injury is mild and the symptoms should resolve in 24–48 hours. But in some cases, the sunburn is moderate or severe and requires immediate medical attention or you could have reduction or even loss of vision.

Some symptoms of a sunburned eye are pain, a gritty feeling, a burning sensation, red and/or swollen eyes or lids, blurry vision, headaches, glare or halos around light sources, and sensitivity to light. If any of these symptoms are severe or last more than 48 hours, get medical attention immediately.

How can you protect your eyes from sunburns?

- Wear 100% UV blocking sunglasses.
- Wear a hat with a brim, if possible.
- Limit the amount of time your eyes are exposed to sunlight or sun-reflecting surfaces, such as water, snow, or metal.

Your eyes, just like your skin, will experience lasting adverse effects from UV ray exposure. Sunlight can cause a slow deterioration of the cells in your eyes which can lead to eye diseases such as age-related macular degeneration and cataracts. These eye diseases can eventually rob you of your eyesight.

Don't Sweat through the Symptoms

With summer comes the heat. Be alert for the following symptoms of heat exhaustion:

Headache	Heavy Sweating
Dizziness	Confusion
Weakness	Clammy Skin
Light-headedness	Nausea/Vomiting

If someone has these symptoms, help them lie down in a cool area with their legs raised above their heart. Remove any excess layers of clothing. Give them up to one liter of water; do not give them anything to drink if they have vomiting. Use cool, wet cloths and a fan to cool them down. Then seek medical attention.

How can you beat the heat? These safety tips from the National Safety Council are a good start.

- Eat lightly—the more calories you consume, the more body heat you produce.
- Drink plenty of water before you go outside and throughout the day.
- Avoid liquids that contain alcohol, caffeine, or large amounts of sugar.
- Wear clothing that allows you skin to breathe and that absorbs sweat.
- Take frequent breaks in shady areas.
- Apply sunscreen at least 20 minutes before you go outside and regularly reapply sunscreen throughout the day.
- Get trained in first aid to learn how to respond to treat heat-related emergencies.

Stay cool, hydrated and, well rested so you can enjoy your fun in the sun! For a quick 2-minute summer safety video from the National Safety Council, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XG5E4aPizU>.



5-minute safety talk

Sharing the Roads Safely

There are many factors that contribute to our safety and the safety of others on the road. Being aware of our surroundings and understanding how to share the roads safely with others improves your chance of avoiding potentially deadly situations.

Work Zones

Highway work zone sites can be a challenge to drivers. Navigate with courtesy and caution. In 2013, 579 people were killed and 24,680 people were injured in work zone crashes, according to *Injury Facts*®. There are many things to consider when driving in work zones:

- Construction vehicles will enter and leave construction zones at low speeds and unexpected places
- Workers and construction activities may encroach into driving lanes
- Hazards may be present even when no construction activity is underway; look for large edge drop-offs, rough pavement, sharp turns and misleading old pavement markings

The Blind Spot of Larger Vehicles

Blind spots are areas all around a truck where collisions with other vehicles are more likely to occur because the truck cannot see your vehicle.

- When following a tractor-trailer, develop the habit of following at a distance that allows you to see both of the outside mirrors. If you cannot see both outside mirrors, the driver cannot see you either.
- When passing a larger vehicle, do not cut back in without first being able to see the front tires of the truck on the pavement in your inside rear-view mirror.
- Larger vehicles need more room to make turns. If the vehicle is signaling a right turn, stay behind it, away from the curbside, until the turn is completed.
- The larger the vehicle and the higher the speed, the longer it takes for it to stop.

School Buses

School buses mean children are or may be near. Here are the safest actions to take when approaching a school bus:

- Reduce your speed
- Expect children to appear out of nowhere
- Cover the brake
- Remember, if the amber lights on the bus are flashing, the bus is about to stop
- Stop if the red lights are flashing and the stop arm is extended, the bus is stopped or stopping
- Do not pass a school bus with flashing red lights or an extended stop arm

Since state laws may vary on which vehicles must stop for stopped school buses on divided roadways, check with your state and local governments for the enforceable statute in your area.

Bicyclists

Bike riding has become more than a hobby. For some people, it is their only mode of transportation. Generally, bicyclists are prohibited from using freeways and interstate highways. Yet on all big or small roads, bikes are allowed and cyclists have a right to use the road as dictated by state and local regulations. Share the roads safely with bicyclists:

- Be considerate – bicyclists usually have the same rights and responsibilities as any motor vehicle
- Be generous – share the space and give cyclists trailing room
- Be patient – give them their space and pass with care
- Be aware – check for bikes in your side view mirror when opening your door

Motorcyclists

The appearance of a motorcycle in a traffic situation when the motorist is not prepared can lead to a hazardous situation. Generally speaking, it is the driver of the vehicle who did not see the motorcycle before the collision, or did not see it until it was too late to avoid the crash. Motorcyclists are not difficult to see if the motorist is prepared:

- Drive defensively by constantly scanning the roadway looking for hazards
- Cooperate with motorcyclists on the road
- Use common sense, courtesy and the law when interacting with motorcyclists
- Use the "what-if" strategy when driving near motorcyclists
- Use a safe following distance when behind a motorcycle

As drivers, we are responsible for our roadway community by learning and making a commitment to drive safely and defensively to reduce traffic collisions and violations.

*Information courtesy of
NSC Driver Safety Training*

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members get more



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What is the purpose of the Rope Access Team, in your opinion?

I think Reclamation's Rope Access Team serves many purposes. We have so many facilities that can be extremely difficult to access without the use of ropes. Having a team of rope technicians willing to investigate, inspect, replace, and/or repair features of any given project is extremely beneficial to our agency. We can access unstable slopes that have high risk of damaging our infrastructures. We can inspect penstocks and other internal features of our dams. Survey prisms can be easily repaired or replaced on the faces of our dams. Difficult mapping projects and even drilling projects have been successfully completed. The team consists of a diverse group of individuals with many different backgrounds, including geologists, engineers, mechanics, maintenance personnel, inspectors, and even water district personnel. Each one of us has value in providing expertise in our diverse fields. It helps keep our facilities functioning and provides safety and security for the public.

What is the biggest challenge you face on the Rope Access Team?

The biggest challenge for me on the Rope Access Team is that it is not an everyday experience, so I don't get as much exposure as I would like. I have worked with instructors from outside sources and a few technicians from Reclamation that have years of knowledge and experience. They seem to have a solution for any given situation without much time to think about it. I want to be at that level one day, but it takes time to get that kind of experience.



Walter Woods and Nathan Harp

Photo Credit: Jamel Carry

What is the best or most interesting experience you've had on the Rope Access Team?

I have had some pretty interesting jobs on the Rope Access Team, but my favorite is the work we do with the Central Utah Water District in the High Uintas. Each year we spend about a week highscaling on the right abutment at Upper Stillwater Dam. The project involves hauling all our heavy climbing gear, brooms, shovels, crowbars, and sometimes even chainsaws to the top of a 250-foot vertical cliff. After anchoring our ropes, we descend a series of vertical drops, knocking loose debris, boulders, and slabs of rock off the face of the abutment. Rope management can be a little tricky sometimes, especially keeping the big rocks from falling on your rope and slicing through it. The job is exciting but it can also be a bit intimidating.

What is the one piece of advice you'd give to someone who is interested in becoming a member of the Rope Access Team?

Avoid complacency and always be aware of your surroundings. A lot of the work we do becomes somewhat repetitive, and over time it can almost become muscle memory. Do you have the right gear for the job? Is your descending device set up correctly and is it the right size for the rope you are using? Is your radio working? These are all things that should be addressed before even thinking about going over an edge, but they can easily be overlooked, especially when it has been done repetitively over the course of the day. Rope access jobs do have potential risks, and if we become complacent, that risk multiplies exponentially.

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Anything else you want to add?

I had the opportunity to attend the Hoover Dam Rope Access training in March of 2019, and the training was one of the most valuable experiences I have had since I have been on the rope team. The scenarios we were given during the training challenged me to plan, lead, communicate, and successfully complete a rescue with an entire team of experienced technicians. In the end, I left Hoover feeling a sense of accomplishment and comradeship with a team of diverse individuals, which I am so lucky to be part of.



Monte Brewer and Allison Cryns

Photo courtesy of Allison Cryns

Did You Know: SMIS Dashboard

Number of Accidents Reported Each Calendar Month in SMIS, FY2017 to Present

